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NEWS RELEASE

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Results of 2002 State Assessments Show Strong Gains in Elementary Schools, High Schools

WEST WARWICK—The state's high-school students improved significantly in five of the eight subtests in the state assessments administered last spring, according to results released today by the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The results also showed that the state's elementary-school students improved significantly in seven of nine subtests. The tests assess student performance in several areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and health.

But the state's middle-school students improved significantly in only one of eight subtests and declined significantly in two of the subtests. (A significant change was defined as a change of 3 or more percentage points.)

In releasing the scores, Peter McWalters, commissioner of elementary and secondary education, said that he was particularly pleased with the high-school results.

"We are already seeing the results from the beginnings of our high-school reform initiatives," McWalters said. "Last year, the high-school results declined slightly, but this year they're up almost across the board. In part, that's because the high schools made a concerted effort to ensure that all students were tested."

The scores on the subtests represent the percentage of students in each school that met or surpassed the state's performance standards. Students who do not take the tests are given a "no score" and are counted among the students who did not meet the standard. Last year, about 15 percent of the state's high-school students received "no score." This year, only about 8 percent received "no score."

As in previous years, the highest scores were among the elementary-school students, more than half of whom met the state standards in five of the nine subtests. In one of the reading tests, nearly three of four students met the state standard. Elementary-school students made exceptional gains in writing. They improved by 17 percentage points over the past five years on two of the writing subtests.

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“Though we want to celebrate the performance of the elementary-school students and the progress made by our high schools, the numbers at our high schools are still too low and the middle schools are showing a decline,” McWalters said. “Also, the equity gaps in the upper grades—between high poverty students and others, between minority students and others—continue to widen. We are concerned that performance at the elementary level is not being sustained at the middle- and high-school level, especially among minority, high poverty, and special needs students.”

The assessment results were released in a news conference at West Warwick Senior High School, which met the goal of 3-percent improvement on all of its tests. The West Warwick students performed particularly well in reading, where their scores showed about a 20-percentage point improvement.

Six other school districts also met the 3-percent goal in all of the high-school tests: Chariho, Narragansett, New Shoreham, North Providence, Portsmouth, and South Kingstown. Every district improved by 3 percent or more in at least some of the high-school level tests.

At the elementary level, three districts met the goal of 3 percent improvement on all of their tests: Burrillville, Foster, and Scituate. Again, every district improved by 3 percent or more in at least some of the elementary-level tests.

“We want to ensure that the progress we’re seeing in many of our school districts is sustained at all levels and in all the districts in our state—urban and well as suburban,” McWalters said.

The results released today will be used to calculate the “school-performance categories,” which the department plans to release next month.

The assessment data released today has been posted on the department’s Web site: www.rido.net.

